

16 Sept 59

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3. EVIDENCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE INVOLVEMENT IN LAOS

During the period of Pathet Lao insurgency in northern Laos from 1954 to 1957, these Communist elements were strongly supported by the North Vietnamese who provided advisers, technicians and materiel, as well as moral support in the Communists' struggle against the Royal Lao Government. The Lao Communist leaders have maintained their liaison with the North Vietnamese regime during the intervening period, and, without question, were acting with the full support and concurrence of their North Vietnamese sponsors when they resumed their dissidence in July of this year.

In the first few weeks of the renewed insurgency, the dissident attacks were uncoordinated, sporadic raids on isolated Lao outposts. On 30 August, however, the dissidents launched simultaneous attacks on five Lao outposts along a 40-mile front in northeastern Sam Neua Province.

According to unconfirmed [redacted] reports, the attackers crossed the Ma River in pneumatic boats driven by outboard motors and were supported by 57mm recoilless rifles, 81mm, and possibly 120mm, mortars. In this regard, an assortment of weapons captured to date includes a submachine gun, rifle and hand grenades, all of Communist origin. This

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transition to a more conventional form of warfare strongly suggests a greater degree of participation by the North Vietnamese. In addition, refugees from the battle zone stated that a large proportion of the attacking force was North Vietnamese, that they not only heard shouts in the Vietnamese language, but knew the names of certain of the attackers, since they had fought against them during the Indochina War. Unconfirmed reports [redacted] indicate that the Government holds as prisoners eight "Vietnamese Communists" who recently surrendered to Government forces in Sam Neua Province. Six of these North Vietnamese reportedly are now in Vientiane and two more are expected to arrive there soon. Four of these POW's are reported to have said that they had seen many troops in North Vietnam who had been wounded in the fighting in Laos and that they had also seen a notice recalling to service all former military personnel who had participated in the Viet Minh operations in the Sam Neua area in 1953.

Although no North Vietnamese regular military units have as yet been identified in the fighting, the North Vietnamese probably have made use of ethnic minority personnel, trained and indoctrinated on the North Vietnam side of the border, as cadres for the Lao dissident forces. These personnel were needed to permit the dissidents to perform as effectively

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as they did in the 30 August attack. Furthermore, the heavy weapons and the ammunition for them could only have come from North Vietnam.

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Another indication of North Vietnamese involvement is seen in the activities of Radio Hanoi. The radio has (i) incited the Lao people to revolt, (ii) reproduced exhaustively the articles of the Lao Communist newspaper, (iii) threatened Laos if it did not follow the course advocated by the Communists, and (iv) increased its broadcasts in the Lao language by three per day since 15 June. These actions constitute interference in the internal affairs of Laos, support of the rebels against the government, and agitating the people to rise up against the legally constituted authorities.

Although the evidence of North Vietnamese involvement in Laos is largely unconfirmed, the belief of covert North Vietnamese involvement appears to be substantiated

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SITUATION IN LAOS

Heavy coordinated Communist attacks which began on 30 August along a broad front in north-eastern Laos may signal a new phase of intensive operations to seize control of Sam Neua Province. The attacking force, which

against the Communist stronghold in the Muong Son salient. This new Communist pressure may place government forces again on the defensive while small Communist bands circulate freely throughout the province, propagandizing and intimidating the villagers.

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may have totaled three battalions, swept over the Laotian Army's lightly garrisoned posts along the Nam Ma River and now poses a threat to Sam Neua town, the provincial capital. The Laotian Army has formed a defense line northeast of Sam Neua, and late press reports state that Communist patrols have been sighted 12 to 18 miles north of the town.

The situation in most of Phong Saly Province has remained relatively quiet, although there is a small concentration of Communist partisans operating in the extreme southeastern corner of the province. However, in both Phong Saly and Sam Neua,

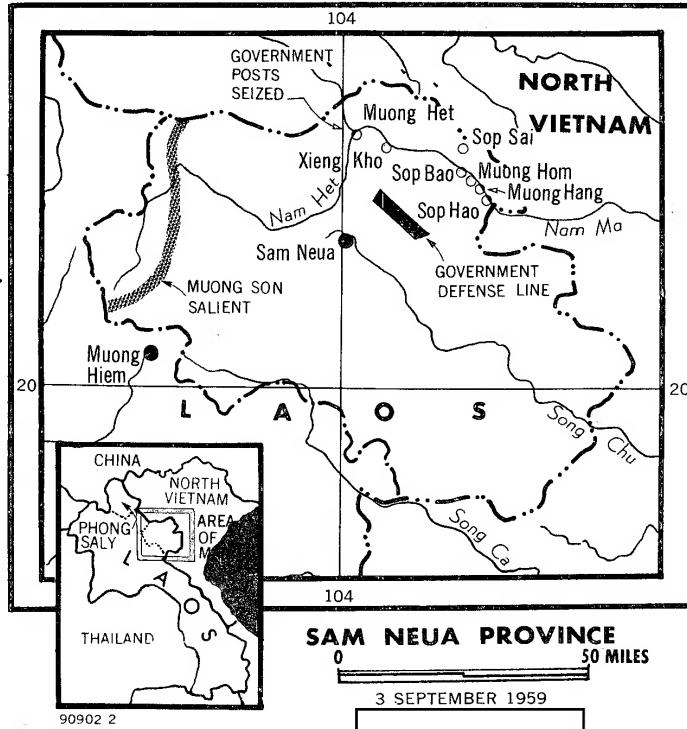
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consider the supply situation serious.

Communist dissidents are active in northeastern Luang Prabang Province, and toward the

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officials assert that the Communist attack force included a high percentage of North Vietnamese soldiers. They also state that three units were supported by 81-mm. and 120-mm. mortar fire and that during the attack on Muong Het, there was 105-mm. artillery fire from across the North Vietnamese border. These claims are unconfirmed. It is more likely, because of the distance to the border, that the reported artillery fire was mortar fire from closer range.

The attacks in northeastern Laos may have been timed to spread out government forces and stall the attack developing



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end of August about 1,000 people from this region had taken refuge in the royal capital, Luang Prabang. A government post at Muong Hiem in the extreme northeast of the province reportedly is threatened by several companies of Communist partisans.

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Soviet Moves

The USSR on 27 August rejected Britain's proposal for a neutral UN observer to Laos, terming it a "substitute for the procedure" provided by the Geneva agreements, "directed at abrogation of the agreement concerning the International Control Commission (ICC)." In an interview with a British Foreign Office official, Soviet Ambassador Malik proposed instead that the heads of the three delegations of the suspended commission for Laos, together with "some auxiliary personnel," investigate the causes of the present situation and report to the cochairmen, Britain and the USSR. While the Soviet proposal is designed to appear to compromise on previous demands for return of the ICC to Laos, its reference to "the resumption of the International Commission's activities in Laos" and to "the functioning of the commission" as an "indispensable" and "integral" part of the Geneva agreements clearly shows that the Soviet aim is complete reactivation of the ICC.

Following the Soviet proposal a *Pravda* editorial on 30 August, claiming that the new American military assistance to Laos has "seriously aggravated" the situation, called for an end of US "intervention" but did not demand the return of the ICC. TASS on 27 August asserted that the dispatch of UN observers to Laos would only be a maneuver to cover up American interference.

The entire Communist bloc has vigorously protested the American decision to send emergency aid to Laos, terming it "another serious violation of the Geneva agreements."

Hanoi-Peiping Responses

In a speech made on the occasion of North Vietnam's National Day on 2 September, Premier Pham Van Dong stated that American policy "directly and seriously threatens North Vietnam and jeopardizes peace in Indochina and Southeast Asia." In the next part of his speech, however, Dong commented on the forthcoming Eisenhower-Khrushchev talks, remarking that the "Vietnamese people believe that this exchange will help to settle problems between the East and West." Given the context of this statement, it suggests that Hanoi may expect the Soviet premier to discuss the Laotian situation during his US stay.

Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi has been highly critical of American activities in Laos, using language which is markedly similar to Hanoi's, while adding that American actions menace the security of China as well as North Vietnam. In his speech, made on the occasion of Hanoi's National Day, Chen Yi categorically

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stated that the "neutrality of Laos must be guaranteed in accordance with the Geneva agreements."

The Communists have exhibited a certain sensitivity to Western accusations of aggression. Chen Yi flatly asserted on 2 September that China has never "encroached on other countries" and that "we stand for the settlement of disputes between nations through peaceful negotiations." On 3 September, Hanoi felt it necessary to issue a statement

categorically denying "recent allegations by Americans and royal Laotian circles that North Vietnamese Army units are on Laotian territory."

The Hanoi spokesman reasoned that the United States was attempting to "deceive world opinion" and to gain a pretext for expanding the civil war. He warned that the American and Phoui Sananikone governments must bear full responsibility for a situation which "they themselves created." [redacted]

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